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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 002937

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [EG](#) [IS](#) [SU](#)  
SUBJECT: EGYPT HOPING NEW MEASURES LESSEN MIGRANT FLOW TO ISRAEL

REF: A. CAIRO 2826  
[1](#)B. CAIRO 2816  
[1](#)C. TEL AVIV 2874  
[1](#)D. CAIRO 2195  
[1](#)E. 2006 CAIRO 170

Classified by Minister Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs William R. Stewart for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The MFA's refugee point-man says that his primary mission is to avoid any civil unrest from Egypt's large refugee and migrant population. He said he was "privately uncomfortable" about his government's August decision to accept 48 Africans from Israel, who had illegally crossed the Israeli border, implying that this set a bad precedent. The GOE claims to have good working relations on this issue with both Israel and UNHCR. GOE officials continue to show little interest in proposed UNHCR-led tripartite discussions with Israel. End summary.

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Keeping Stability Foremost  
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[1](#)2. (C) In a September 27 introductory meeting, MFA Deputy Assistant Minister for Refugees Tarek El Maaty, the MFA point-man on refugees, told Polecon MinCouns that his primary mission was to "avoid another December 2005," (i.e., when Egyptian security forcibly broke up a demonstration of Sudanese outside UNHCR headquarters in Cairo, killing nearly 30 - ref E). Along these lines, the GOE is considering assisting with repatriation of the large South Sudanese population in Cairo by providing air transportation between Cairo and Juba, in South Sudan, for South Sudanese who are facing prohibitively expensive and arduous travel. According to El Maaty, there are between three and four million Sudanese in Egypt, with 25,000 registered as refugees with UNHCR.

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48 Africans Returned in August: A Precedent?  
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[1](#)3. (C) El Maaty registered his "personal discomfort" that Egypt had accepted 48 Africans returned by Israel in August, repeating a GOE denial that any bilateral agreement for Israel to return border crossers had been solidified (ref D). Maaty said he had "personally advised" Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit against accepting the 48 Africans from Israel, worrying that this would set a precedent for Egypt to accept further returnees. Egypt had no responsibility to do so, he explained, as Israel is itself violating the 1951 UN

convention on refugees by returning those with refugee status to Egypt, no matter that they had entered Israel illegally. However, this decision, and others on refugees on the border, are taken at a "high level," he said.

¶4. (SBU) As for the 48 returned Africans, they are "not in jail" but are well-treated in a "safe place," El Maaty said. He noted that the GOE is still determining how best to proceed, and that even those with refugee status are in violation of Egyptian law for illegally crossing borders. That said, the GOE has made a policy decision not to return them to Sudan. Of the 48, El Maaty said, three have refugee status and 23 are asylum-seekers, confirming previous GOE and UNHCR information (refs A and B).

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Returns and Increased Security Slowing Crossing Attempts?  
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¶5. (SBU) El Maaty said that attempts at illegal border crossings seem to have slowed recently, attributing this to increased Egyptian security efforts west of Suez (refs A and B). Benny Sharoni, Israeli Embassy PolCouns, told poloffs on September 30 that publicity from Israel's return of the 48, and promise of further returns, may also be discouraging crossing attempts. Israeli government figures, reported in international press, confirm this slowdown, saying that in comparison to 900 Africans who crossed into Israel in July 2007, only about 150 had done so in September as of September ¶24.

¶6. (SBU) Nevertheless, reports of violent incidents on the border continue, which may also serve as a deterrent to

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would-be crossers. The Egyptian government-daily Al Ahram reported on September 18 that one Eritrean was killed and five taken into custody when attempting to illegally cross the border into Israel. Asked about the incident, El Maaty had no specifics but repeated the GOE line that any shootings are "of course an accident." He repeated GOE requests for the USG to lobby Israel to allow more Egyptian forces on the border, to control border crossings with less use of violence.

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GOE "Working Well" With Israel, UNHCR  
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¶7. (SBU) Although El Maaty himself has no contacts with the Israelis, he said that contact existed on this issue and that decisions occurred "at the highest levels." Other MFA contacts have previously told us that working level contacts with Israel on this issue are "good" (ref A). (Note: Sharoni also reported good contact with the GOE, but acknowledged that the Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS) is Israel's primary interlocutor on this issue. End note.) El Maaty said he talks to UNHCR representatives in Cairo "all the time," but did not indicate willingness to seek UNHCR assistance with formulating policy on the migrant issue, again reflecting comments from other MFA officials (ref A).

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Comment  
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¶8. (C) The GOE wishes the African migrant problem would disappear quietly. The GOE efforts to interdict migrants west of Suez (refs A and B) and the publicity of Israel returning migrants may indeed be limiting the flow. MFA contacts continue to dismiss the need for UNHCR involvement, and Israeli Embassy contacts here indicate that the GOI as well would prefer to give the bilateral process a chance to succeed before seeking third party involvement.  
JONES